

To prevent child abuse, help CT parents and caregivers

Pinwheels mark National Child Abuse Prevention Month.



by [Drs. Julia Rosenberg and Andrea Asnes](#) April 20, 2023 @ 12:01 am

Reader Opinion

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Amid the spring flowers and daffodils that break through the softening earth every spring, you may notice some strategically placed pinwheels, spinning and reflecting light in the emerging spring sun. These pinwheels appear every April to mark [National Child Abuse Prevention Month](#).

Unlike many childhood problems, child abuse, which includes neglect and physical abuse, is a problem of parents and caregivers. To prevent it, we should focus on adults who may be at risk of harming children. The good news is that we already know about many modifiable risk factors for child abuse, such as poverty, unemployment, and housing insecurity. Simply put, if we can support the adults who care for children, children will be safer.

Recent data support this claim. Consider tax credits for parents and caregivers, which put money into the hands of low-income families. A [recent study looked at the impact of state-based Weekly Earned Income Tax Credits and Child Tax Credits](#). The study's authors found that for every \$1,000 put into a family's pocket, child maltreatment reports decreased by an estimated 5%.

To qualify for refunds, parents may need to file tax returns even if they do not owe taxes. Free tax preparation services, like the one we [provide in our pediatric clinic](#), can improve access to these benefits to reach more parents. Did you know that one of the benefits of Connecticut's Earned Income Tax Credit program's expansion was preventing child abuse, in addition to positive impacts, like [lifting thousands of children out of poverty](#)?

Now consider Connecticut's Medicaid program, HUSKY, which provides health insurance to certain income-eligible adults and their children. At first, it may seem counterintuitive to tie adult health insurance coverage to child abuse prevention, but it is not; a [2019 study](#) found that after Medicaid expansion for adults, there was a significant decrease in the number of reported cases of abuse in young children.

As the authors of the study discussed, the decrease in child abuse could be explained by newfound financial stability and access to health care, including mental health care, that resulted from health insurance enrollment.

We should be proud that Connecticut has recently expanded health insurance eligibility for children up to 12 years of age regardless of documentation status, but to truly protect children's health and safety, we should redouble our commitment by extending the same benefit not only to all children but also to their parents and caregivers.

The bottom line is that all state spending to support parents protects children. Let's look at the results of one more [study](#) that examined U.S. states' spending for people living in poverty. This spending took the form of cash, housing, and other assistance programs, such as childcare, refundable tax credits, and medical assistance programs. The study found that the more states provided in all forms of assistance to needy families, the less child abuse occurred. It estimated that \$1,000 invested per person living in poverty could prevent about 180,000 reports to child protective services, 4,000 foster care placements, and could prevent 100 children's deaths yearly in the U.S. The effect is clear; supporting families can substantially benefit the safety and wellbeing of our children.

Pinwheels were chosen as a symbol for Child Abuse Prevention Month because, much like the bright spring flowers they appear alongside, they symbolize hope and the joys that childhood

should bring. Connecticut is poised to do so much more to preserve children's health and safety than plant pinwheel gardens. Current proposed legislation could provide the financial support parents need through innovative initiatives like [increasing the earned income tax credit](#), [expanding HUSKY health benefits](#), and covering additional costs of childcare.

To keep our children safe, let's encourage our legislators to support their parents and caregivers.